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WRESTLING WITH THE SHADOW: THE PANLOGISM CONTROVERSY IN HEGEL'S FRENCH RECEPTION (1897–1927)

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This article widens the scope of the history of Hegel's reception in turn-of-the-century French philosophy by thematizing an often neglected moment, namely the years 1897 to 1927. Before the so-called "Hegel renaissance," in fact, the Hegelian dialectics was generally understood as a "panlogist" doctrine aimed at dissolving the concrete individual in the abstract dimension of the concept or in the all-encompassing realm of Absolute Spirit. However, even at the beginning of the century, attempts were made to provide a more positive assessment of Hegelian philosophy. The author reconstructs this panlogist controversy by analyzing the points of view of some prominent philosophers of the time, namely Charles Renouvier, René Berthelot, Émile Boutroux, Émile Meyerson and Léon Brunschvicg. The aim of the article is to provide a deeper understanding of the historical continuities and discontinuities characterizing Hegel's reception in France.

INTRODUCTION

In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, on 2 December 1970, Michel Foucault (1926–84) claimed that his "entire epoch, whether in logic or epistemology, whether in Marx or Nietzsche, [was] trying to escape from Hegel."[1] Nonetheless, he added right after, one does not simply avoid or escape Hegelian philosophy, for it is impossible to pretend to be external to its conceptual framework and to the functioning of its dialectics. In fact, we might discover that "our resources against [Hegel] are perhaps still a ruse which he is using against us, and at the end of which he is waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere."[2] According to Foucault, the revelation of a certain conceptual unavoidability of Hegel was the great legacy of his former professor and predecessor at the Collège de France, Jean

[1] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader* (Boston, 1981), 48–78, at 74.

[2] Ibid.

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Hyppolite (1907–68).[3] The crucial role played by Hyppolite in the acclimation of Hegelian philosophy in France is well known and regularly assessed by scholars.[4] In his lecture, Foucault provided a brief but poignant account of Hyppolite's overall legacy, also acknowledging how much his own work was indebted to his teaching. However, Foucault's praise contains a passing remark that should be of great interest to any historian of contemporary French thought: no one more than Hyppolite, he declared, "took the trouble to give a presence to *the great and somewhat ghostly shadow* [cette grande ombre un peu fantomatique] *of Hegel which had been on the prowl since the nineteenth century* and with which people used to wrestle obscurely."[5]

Admittedly, Foucault is primarily interested in highlighting the originality of his master's contribution. Still, his remark is quite intriguing, for, as vague as it is, it acknowledges that the French reception of Hegel developed through many stages and that the so-called "Hegel renaissance" of the 1930s was preceded by a long tormented work of assimilation that has its roots in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, as we will see, Foucault's brilliant formulation conceals a more complex historical evolution.

It is hard to tell how much Foucault was aware of the actual nature of these early stages of Hegel's reception, which only recently have become the object of serious historical scrutiny. He likely had in mind the famous "Rapport sur l'état des études hégéliennes en France,"[6] where Alexandre Koyré (1892–1964) declared that, as of 1930, Hegel studies in France were practically nonexistent. Nonetheless, recent literature has since enriched the picture with more in-depth analyses of the historical passages linking the Hegel renaissance of the late 1920s/1930s—which, as is well known, began with the works and teachings of Jean Wahl (1888–1974), Koyré himself and Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968)[7]—to the philosophical milieu

3 Jean Hyppolite held the chair of history of philosophical thought from 1963 until his death in 1968.

4 Nevertheless, the influence of his thought and teaching over the protagonists of the 1960s and 1970s still demands in-depth examination. For a first step in this direction see Giuseppe Bianco, ed., *Jean Hyppolite, entre structure et existence* (Paris, 2013).

5 Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," 4, emphasis added.

6 Now in Alexandre Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris, 1961), 225–51.

7 Wahl's *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, published by Rieder in 1929, was composed of articles that had appeared over the previous three years in French reviews such as the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* or the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. Furthermore, in 1931, the hundredth anniversary of Hegel's death, the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* devoted an issue to an assessment of Hegel's philosophy including contributions of major figures like Victor Basch, René Berthelot and Martial Gueroult (1891–1976). The publication of Alain's *Idées* in 1932 also played an important role in rehabilitating the image of Hegel.

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of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8] As Bruce Baugh has shown,[9] the interpretations of the 1930s, which were prompted by the discovery of the "romantic" Hegel of the early Jena writings[10] and which focused primarily on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, were for the most part reactions against the *fin de siècle* image of Hegel as the "logicist" author of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, translated into French by the Italian Augusto Vera (1813–85) from 1859 to 1868. Indeed, as Baugh reminds us, at the beginning of the twentieth century some of the major figures of the French philosophical community, such as Émile Boutroux (1845–1921) and Léon Brunschvicg (1869–1944), expressed strong reservations regarding Hegel's speculative philosophy.

In particular, a controversy arose on Hegel's alleged "*panlogism*." This term was first introduced by Johann Eduard Erdmann (1805–92), a representative of the Hegelian right, to denote what he considered to be the core assumption of the Hegelian doctrine, namely the idea that the real is fully intelligible and can be reduced to the laws of thought.[11] In the final pages of the last volume of his *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, published in 1853, he wrote, "The proper name of [Hegel's] doctrine is panlogism. This doctrine states that only reason is real and grants the nonrational [*Unvernünftigen*] only a transient and self-sublating [*sich selbst aufhebende*] existence."[12] This notion of a reason that attributes a merely momentary and passing existence to what is contingent, individual and, therefore, irrational (or nonrational) would become common currency in France.

Already at the turn of the century, attempts were made to counter this commonplace and enlarge the perspective on Hegel's philosophy, the most

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8 Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (London, 2003); and Andrea Bellantone, *Hegel in Francia (1817–1941)*, 2 vols. (Soveria Mannelli, 2006). It is worth mentioning also the historical sketch offered by Gwendoline Jarczyk and Pierre-Jean Labarrière in the first chapter of their *De Kojève à Hegel: 150 ans de pensée hégélienne en France* (Paris, 1996). For a broader picture more centered on the twentieth century see Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not a Humanism Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010). More specifically on Hegel's reception in the twentieth century, from Koyré onwards, see Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, 1987); and Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca and London, 1988).

9 Baugh, *French Hegel*, 9–10.

10 On this point see Alexandre Koyré, "Hegel à Jena," in Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*, 147–90.

11 André Lalande, ed., *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1997), 2: 732.

12 Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der Geschichte der neuern Philosophie. Dritten Bandes. Zweite Abtheilung. Die Entwicklung der deutschen Spekulation seit Kant* (Leipzig, 1853), 835.

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important of them being probably René Berthelot's report at the Société française de philosophie in 1907. Of course, Berthelot (1872–1960) was not the only one to suggest a positive reading of Hegel,[13] but he was certainly the most influential advocate Hegel had at the time. Nevertheless, as I will show, the French philosophical community that gathered around the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1893), the *société* (1901) and the collective enterprise of Lalande's *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (1902) was very reluctant to welcome this rehabilitation of Hegel.[14] I am referring here in particular to those members who occupied chairs in key Parisian institutions like the Sorbonne and the École normale supérieure (ENS) or played relevant roles in the selection process, for example Boutroux and Brunschvicg, who, in a master–disciple succession, both taught at the Sorbonne and chaired the commission of the *agrégation*, a position that authorized them to nominate the other members and decide the subjects for examination, exercising strong control over the circulation of ideas and topics.[15] Eccentric figures like the Polish-born Émile Meyerson (1859–1933), positioned outside academia but well regarded in philosophical circles, shared the same criticism, while adopting a more nuanced and positive perspective.

The many factors behind this hostility were not solely theoretical. At the time, in fact, the philosophical climate of the Third Republic was dominated by a general

[13] The entry on Hegel in the *Grande encyclopédie Larousse* (1893), written by Lucien Herr (1865–1926) and *Les origines du socialisme d'état en Allemagne* (1897) by Charles Andler (1866–1933), tried to rehabilitate Hegel as a philosopher of history and a political thinker whose work contained a revolutionary potential. Herr and Andler were in fact socialist militants close to Jean Jaurès (1859–1914) and Léon Blum (1872–1950). In 1897, Georges Noël (?–1900), professor at the lycée Lakanal (Sceaux), wrote a book titled *La logique de Hegel*, where he opposed the panlogist interpretation: "Hegel's system is not, as many have said, a panlogism. Panlogism is a chimera that would not withstand close examination and that could not haunt the mind of a philosopher worthy of the name." Georges Noël, *La logique de Hegel* (Paris, 1897), 120. Finally, in 1912 Paul Roques, professor of German at the lycée de Chartres, published the first biography of Hegel, *Hegel, sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris, 1912). However, these efforts where doomed to wield little influence on the philosophical milieu: Herr was in fact the librarian of the École normale, Andler failed twice the *agrégation de philosophie* due to a disagreement over German philosophy with the commission chaired by Jules Lachelier (he reportedly quoted Hegel) and pursued a career as a Germanist (see Daniel Lindenberg, "Un maître des études germaniques malgré lui: Charles Andler," *Préfaces* 13 (1989), 89–92), while Noël and Roques were unknown and isolated professors, although Noël's book appeared as articles in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.

[14] For the importance of these networks see Stéphan Soulié, *Les philosophes en République* (Rennes, 2009).

[15] On the *agrégation* see Alan D. Schrift, "Effects of the *Agrégation de Philosophie* on Twentieth-Century French Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46/3 (2008), 449–74.

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framework in which spiritualist motifs like the subject's self-determination or the irreducibility of the *esprit* to the socio-psycho-biological level merged with a strategic use of the moral and epistemological tools of the Kantian critique.[16] Recent studies have shown in a profound way how much the assimilation of Kant's critical project contributed to the creation of a common theoretical and ideological ground for republican philosophy,[17] in particular after the defeat at Sedan (1870) and the trauma of the Commune (1871). It is worth highlighting that we are not dealing with a neo-Kantianism comparable to that developing in Germany over approximately the same years. More properly, we should speak of *uses* of Kant that helped French philosophy to renew certain tenets of its own national tradition. The defeat at Sedan, in fact, far from being perceived as a mere military event, triggered a long process of spiritual and political self-criticism that, as a classic study has shown,[18] determined, from an institutional point of view, a secular modernization of the French educational system inspired by the German model and,[19] on the intellectual level, an ambiguous relationship with the new neighboring empire. Germany, in fact, was seen as both the motherland of Kant, the great father of the philosophical modernity, and the belligerent state championing an oppressive and aggressive attitude intellectually epitomized by the totalizing and, indeed, panlogist philosophical systems of German idealism.

Thus the turn-of-the-century French philosophers, attached to their national intellectual tradition and, politically speaking, supporters of liberal or at best social-democratic positions, could not but see in Hegel's dialectics a system threatening irreducibility of the *esprit* and the moral and historical emphasis on the individual and his actions. In this context, the charge of panlogism had many theoretical and nontheoretical undertones. I am not claiming that this controversy can be reduced entirely to political or ideological terms. But when one studies the deeply institutionalized context of the French philosophy

[16] This picture is, of course, complicated by the immense success of Bergson, who, however, never occupied a relevant role in a French university, moving from the professorship at the lycée Henri-IV to the chair at the Collège de France, with a brief stint of two years at the ENS from 1898 to 1900. See Giuseppe Bianco, *Après Bergson: Portrait du group avec philosophe* (Paris, 2015).

[17] Jean Bonnet, *Dékantations: Fonctions idéologiques du kantisme dans le XIXe siècle français* (Bern, 2011); Laurent Fedi, *Kant, une passion française, 1795–1940* (Hildesheim, 2018).

[18] Claude Digeon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870–1914* (Paris, 1992), 4, 109–10, 164.

[19] Christophe Charle, *La republique des universitaires, 1870–1940* (Paris, 1994).

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of the time, it is important to bear in mind the existence of such ideological patterns.[20]

In what follows, I focus precisely on this early "panlogism controversy" considering a time span that runs from Berthelot's lecture in 1907 to the publication of Brunschvicg's *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale* (1927). By singling out this controversy, my aim is not just to deepen the knowledge of a less studied moment in Hegel's reception in France, but also to characterize the internal dynamics of an academic philosophical milieu whose hegemony would not outlive the First World War and the economic crisis of 1929, two events that gave the lie to the emphatic belle époque narrative of intellectual and spiritual progress. The "rehabilitation" of Hegelian philosophy in the 1930s coincided in fact with the progressive disenchantment of the younger generations, appalled by the dramatic experiences of the beginning of the century and dissatisfied with the philosophy professed by the old "mandarins." As in the case of phenomenology, Hegel's reception is thus a privileged point of observation to analyze the internal mutations of French philosophy.

Before getting to the heart of the *querelle*, I first dwell on a paradigmatic example of the late nineteenth-century attitude towards Hegel; that is to say, the influential critique formulated by the neo-criticist philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815–1903). The reason for this choice is that it is against Renouvier's interpretation that Berthelot will deploy his positive evaluation of Hegelian philosophy. Then, I turn to the debate that took place in 1907 at the Société française de philosophie between Berthelot himself and Boutroux around Hegel's alleged panlogism. Finally, in the last two sections, I examine the readings of Hegel's philosophy of history and philosophy of nature formulated in the 1920s by two of the main representatives of the French philosophy of science, namely Meyerson and Brunschvicg. It is worth pointing out that my chief concern here is not Hegel's thought per se, but rather the historical construction of, and the debate surrounding, a certain *image* (the "ghostly shadow," as Foucault says) of his philosophy in France. In what follows, then, many theoretical issues and *aperçus*, otherwise worthy of in-depth analytical assessment, will inevitably be conjured up and left undeveloped for the purpose of a better historical understanding.

RENOUVIER'S CRITIQUE OF HEGEL

The academic "anti-Hegelianism" of the first two decades of the twentieth century was influenced by the critique of the post-Kantian idealist systems

[20] On these stakes see Bernard Bourgeois, "La société des philosophes en France en 1900," in Frédéric Worms, ed., *Le moment 1900 en philosophie* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2004), 63–82.

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formulated in the second half of the previous century by the neo-criticist author and republican militant Charles Renouvier. Despite being an extremely influential figure in the French philosophical milieu, Renouvier was not a university professor and his philosophy received little consideration until the advent of the Third Republic, when Kant entered the "mainstream" of academic philosophy, also thanks to the prolific editorial activity of Renouvier himself.[21] Despite being based in the south of France, he was able to let his voice be heard through his lengthy books and the two reviews he founded with the liberal François Pillon (1830–1914), *L'année philosophique* (1868–1870) and *La critique philosophique* (1872–1889), which were widely read also by the young students of the Sorbonne and the École normale.[22]

Already in the first volume of the *Critique philosophique*, Renouvier published an article where he disdainfully identified Hegelian philosophy, in particular the notion of "objective spirit," as the philosophical expression of the Prussian state: an overwhelming holistic monism that stifles individuality, where individuals have no proper value outside the totality to which they belong. To this, he opposed the liberalism of Kant's project of perpetual peace and the ideal of Europe as a free federation of independent states.[23] The anti-Hegelian use of Kant is at the center also of an 1880 article, where Renouvier negatively illustrates the passage from Kant to Hegel as the displacement of agency and autonomy from the individual to the state qua the subject of history.[24]

However, it is only in the fourth volume of his late book *Philosophie analytique de l'histoire* (1897) that we find a broader and more systematic theoretical assessment of Hegel and German idealism in general. According to Renouvier, whose philosophy is a radical phenomenalism based on the law of relation, the German thinkers overemphasized the role of Kant's noumenalism (a doctrine

[21] Despite the great success of Kantian philosophy in France in the second half of the nineteenth century, Renouvier is the only thinker who could be considered a neo-Kantian philosopher in a proper sense, at least until the *Nouvelle monadologie* (1898), which bears witness to a Leibnizian turn in his thought. Between 1854 and 1864, he published in fact his *Essais de critique générale*, with the explicit aim of prolonging and updating Kant's critical enterprise. For an overall view of Renouvier's theory of knowledge, see Laurent Fedi, *Le problème de la connaissance dans la philosophie de Charles Renouvier* (Paris, 1998).

[22] Laurent Fedi, "Philosopher et républicaniser: La *Critique philosophique* de Renouvier et Pillon, 1872–1889," *Romantisme*, 115 (2002), 65–82.

[23] Charles Renouvier, "La doctrine hégélienne et la politique prussienne," *La critique philosophique* 21 (1872), 321–9. Renouvier's interpretation of Hegel would require a broader political and cultural contextualization that I cannot provide here. See on this matter the excellent Marie-Claude Blaise, *Au principe de la République: Le cas de Renouvier* (Paris, 2000), 43–105.

[24] Charles Renouvier, "La question du progrès—Hegel," *La critique philosophique* 49 (1880), 353–62.

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Renouvier firmly rejects), turning it into a renewed Spinozist substantialism.[25] This path drove them directly into pantheism and a deterministic "emanantism." With Schelling and Hegel, German idealism relinquished its original criticist orientation in order to espouse what Renouvier does not hesitate to consider "alexandrine old junk [*vieilleries*] rejuvenated by means of a vague modern terminology, with images in place of reasoning."[26] In his view, in fact, the Schellinghian and Hegelian conceptions of nature are nothing but refurbished versions of the old Neoplatonic theory of the procession or *emanation* of beings from an all-encompassing One. For this reason, they amount to utter nonsense—in particular Schelling's theories, which Renouvier singles out by dismissively comparing them to the arguments of a "lunatic" (*aliéné*).[27] However, in spite of the differences between Schelling and Hegel, Renouvier makes no distinction when it comes to expose both philosophers as advocates of a doctrine of the Absolute based on the principle of the "indifference of the opposites."

With regard to Hegel in particular, Renouvier's judgment is twofold. On the one hand, he believes that Hegel is "undisputedly the greatest philosophical figure of the [nineteenth] century."[28] On the other hand, however, his philosophy represents a "monstrous system" that defies the principle of noncontradiction by interpreting it in an absolute sense and moving continuously from one opposite to the other.[29] This panlogist stance, if applied to history, explains why Renouvier deems Hegelian philosophy to be the apex of the "school of evolution," where "evolution" means, in the philosophy of history, exactly what "emanation" means in the philosophy of nature. By "evolutionism" Renouvier alludes thus to the tendency to erect philosophical systems based on historical or spiritual narratives where the individual and his freedom have no place whatsoever, where indeterminacy and contingency are obliterated by a sort of magical "helping hand" (*coupe de pouce*).[30] In fact, what Renouvier finds in

[25] Renouvier's hatred of the Spinozian pantheism was influenced by the negative entry on Spinoza in Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697).

[26] Charles Renouvier, *Philosophie analytique de l'histoire: Les idées, les religions, les systèmes*, 4 vols. (Paris 1897), 4: 11.

[27] Ibid., 17.

[28] Charles Renouvier, "De la philosophie du XIXe siècle en France," *L'année philosophique* 1 (1967), 1–108, at 89.

[29] Charles Renouvier, *Esquisse d'une classification systématique des doctrines philosophiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886), 2: 8.

[30] The use of the term "evolutionism" can be explained on the basis of the huge popularity at the time of the theories of Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Haeckel, whose main works had been available in French since the 1860s/1870s.

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Hegel is "an absolute contempt for all that is individual and a low opinion of virtue."[31]

This depiction of Hegel's philosophy of history is at odds with Renouvier's own notion of historical development, which on the contrary is grounded on the discontinuities brought about by the radical freedom of human actions.[32] More generally, Renouvier rejects any historical narrative implying either a process of downfall or an advancement in spirituality and society (e.g. positivism, Saint-Simonianism,[33] Catholicism, etc.). For him, history is nothing but a contingent series of events that are determined by what he calls "acts of absolute deviation,"[34] which are the free acts and choices of individuals.[35] The very idea of an *analytic* philosophy of history, as advocated by Renouvier, entails that the intricate vicissitudes of history can be decomposed into elementary facts, without this resulting in the affirmation of a binding necessity: things might have been different; the course of history could have followed a different path. Renouvier's philosophical novel *Uchronie* (1876) explores precisely the possibility of an alternative history by telling, like it says in the subtitle, "the development of European civilization not as it was but as it might have been."[36] "Analytic" must then be opposed to "synthetic," a term that in Renouvier refers to the tendency to look at history from an organicist perspective, as the unveiling of a predetermined order or the eternal march of an absolute principle through all of its passing actualizations. By contrast, an analytic philosophy of history would focus on the gaps and deviations introduced by the free and unforeseeable acts of men.

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31 Charles Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire: Les idées, les religions, les systèmes* (Paris, 1896): 43.

32 For a broader account of Renouvier's confrontation with Hegel on this point see Jean-Louis Dumas, "Renouvier critique de Hegel," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 1 (1971), 32–52. It is worth noting, in fact, that before turning to Kant the young Renouvier was heavily inspired by Hegelian philosophy, as we can see from his 1847 entry "Philosophie" in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle* edited by Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud. See Laurent Fedi, *Kant, une passion française* (Paris, 2018), 143.

33 Initially, however, Renouvier considered himself a socialist inspired by the Saint-Simonianist ideals he encountered as a student at the École polytechnique in the early 1840s.

34 Quoted in Paul Mouy, *L'idée de progrès dans la philosophie de Renouvier* (Paris, 1927), 79.

35 On the question of history and freedom see also Charles Renouvier, *Science de la morale*, ed. Laurent Fedi, 2 vols. (Paris, 2002; first published 1869), 2: 365–438.

36 The full title is in fact *Uchronie (L'utopie dans l'histoire): Esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être.*

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THE BERTHELOT–BOUTROUX DEBATE

Despite Renouvier's geographical and institutional marginality, his ideas never failed to play a significant role in shaping the public debate around political and philosophical issues. As we have already said, among his readers we find an entire generation of young students born in the 1840s, most of them disciples at the École normale of the monarchic and catholic philosopher Jules Lachelier (1832–1918), who was developing an original combination of spiritualism and Kantianism.[37] Once adults, many of them would occupy key roles in the public administration, like Louis Liard (1846–1917), a future minister of education, and Henri Marion (1846–1896), first professor of pedagogy at the Sorbonne.[38]

It was no surprise, then, when the echo of Renouvier's interpretation of Hegel resounded many years later during a session of the Société française de philosophie devoted precisely to the German philosopher. On 31 January 1907, René Berthelot, professor at the University of Brussels, presented a paper titled "Sur la necessité, la finalité et la liberté chez Hegel," the main aim of which was to rectify some of the most widespread commonplaces affecting the French reception of Hegel, in particular the allegations of absolute determinism, historical optimism and, of course, "panlogism." Son of the great chemist Marcellin, cousin of Élie Halévy (1870–1937) and former student at the ENS, Berthelot was certainly not unfamiliar with the milieu of the *société* and the circle of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. However, it is likely that his peripheral academic position allowed him a certain degree of philosophical freedom, as his studies on Nietzsche, pragmatism and oriental philosophy seem to suggest. Furthermore, he was a dear friend of Léon Blum, and we can assume that the proximity to the latter's socialist circle facilitated his acquaintance with a positive image of Hegel's work.

Besides the old eclectic tradition of Victor Cousin (1792–1867), Berthelot mentions Renouvier as the most flagrant example of the traditional misunderstandings. According to Berthelot, the bias of many misleading interpretations consists in conflating Hegel's doctrine with those of his predecessors, be they Leibniz or Spinoza. By contrast, Hegel's philosophy is

[37] Lachelier was a disciple of Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900) who departed from the spiritualism of his master, which was largely inspired by a mix of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, Neoplatonic cosmology and Maine de Biran's psychological analyses, in order to develop a reflexive philosophy resting on Kantian bases. His only book, *Du fondement de l'induction* (1872), would exert a lasting influence over the following generations of philosophers throughout the Third Republic. On Lachelier see Gaston Mauchaussat, *L'idéalisme de Lachelier* (Paris, 1961). Lachelier passively accepted the spread of Renouvier's ideas, which he nonetheless deemed pernicious.

[38] On the network of Renouvier's readers see Fedi, *Kant, une passion française*, 281–339.

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for Berthelot a "dynamic idealism, a rational finalism, and a philosophy where the logical necessity is posited only in and by its relation with the freedom of the spirit."[39] This amounts to saying that the dialectical method does not entail a prefiguration of what being and history will become. On the contrary, it tries to account for the way in which the spirit reaches increasingly rational syntheses, moving from the psychological individuality to the full spiritual personality, from the abstract notion to the living Idea. In particular, Berthelot rejects the charge of panlogism by emphasizing the fact that the driving force of the Hegelian system is not the understanding, with its analytical subtleties, but rather *a synthetic and dynamic* reason that can—to put it in the famous words Hegel used to describe the Spirit—"tarry with the negative,"[40] or the accidental, and sublate it. Hegel's dialectics is less a prediction than a regressive effort to explain how the spiritual and historical forms "that represent the most differentiated and harmonious things in the universe" emerge from logical and chronological conditions that are often contradictory or abstract.[41] The traditional Aristotelian logic, whose framework was adopted also by Kant, can at best provide a classification of the forms of being, but it turns out to be useless when it comes to determining the dynamic relations between those same forms. Thus considering Hegel's philosophy as a panlogism means failing to do justice to its complex and troubled dialectics between spiritual configurations, which implies that the Idea must develop itself through space and time and must, therefore, "posit the illogic."[42] Furthermore, the narrative of Hegel's philosophy cannot be conceived of as an absolute determinism, for it depicts precisely the progressive emergence and enfranchisement of the spirit from non-rational and "incidental" constraints: the point is not, for Hegel, to tell whether nature or history are governed by determinism or freedom, but rather to separate the essential from the accidental and show where and how certain harmonic relations and rational syntheses are produced.[43]

Berthelot's exposition solicited perplexities and remarks in the participants at the session, who were for the most part members of the Parisian institutional philosophy, such as Alphonse Darlu (1849–1921), a specialist of moral philosophy, general inspector of public education and former teacher of Léon Brunschvicg

[39] René Berthelot, "Le sens de la philosophie de Hegel," in Berthelot, *Évolutionnisme et platonisme: Mélanges d'histoire de la philosophie et d'histoire des sciences* (Paris, 1908), 166–249, at 168.

[40] Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 36; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arthur V. Miller (Oxford, 1977), 19.

[41] Berthelot, "Le sens de la philosophie de Hegel," 174.

[42] Ibid., 189.

[43] Ibid., 185.

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at the lycée Condorcet; the historian of philosophy Victor Delbos (1862–1916), who taught at the Sorbonne; and Marcel Drouin (1871–1943), professor at the lycée Janson-de-Sailly in Paris and founder with André Gide of the *Nouvelle revue française*. However, the main discussant on that occasion was the spiritualist Émile Boutroux, a disciple of Lachelier, professor of history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne and director of the Fondation Thiers. The debate that followed bears witness of the lasting prejudices that hindered Hegel's reception in France, even among the specialists of the philosophical scene *d'outre-Rhine*. We must bear in mind, in fact, that Boutroux was not only one of the foremost experts on modern and contemporary German philosophy, having traveled extensively in Germany in his youth, but also the most influential and powerful member of the French academia.[44]

In his sophisticated and erudite reply, he reverses Berthelot's perspective by proclaiming that Hegelianism is actually an "objective idealism," which means that the development of the Idea does not proceed from the subject's consciousness but from being itself. This explains why Hegel had so little regard for contingency and the individual, which he barred from the realms of concept, finality and law:

> there exist things in the world that are fundamentally indifferent: these are the individual things. For Hegel, individual beings may and must be neglected by history; the individual as such does not have any value per se; he is the instrument, the worker [*ouvrier*] of higher ends: his action cannot be accomplished without using means that are adequate to those ends. In fact, history could be told without proper names, which are nothing but labels.[45]

Of course, Boutroux acknowledges that, for Hegel, the starting point of the "evolution" is the contingent, the individual, *das Zufällige*, as external to Reason. Nevertheless, Boutroux maintains that Hegel's system can be properly labeled a panlogism if we mean by this term not simply the sovereignty of the *Gesetz*, of the *Verstand*, but rather the "omnipotence" of the *Vernunft*. For Boutroux, in fact, Hegel's philosophy is an "absolute rationalism" that erases the individual, "as if

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44 His Germany, however, was that of a "minor" line of post-Kantian thought that he discovered during his first travel in 1869, when he studied under Helmholtz and Zeller, and that included, inter alia, Fischer, Trendelenburg, Erdmann and Riehl. On Boutroux see Fabien Capeillères, "Généalogie d'un néokantisme français: À propos d'Émile Boutroux," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 3 (1998), 405–42; and Michael Heidelberg, "Contingent Laws of Nature in Émile Boutroux," in Michael Heidelberg and Gregor Schiemann, eds., *The Significance of the Hypothetical in the Natural Sciences* (Berlin and New York, 1999), 99–144.

45 Émile Boutroux, "Sur la nécessité, la finalité et la liberté chez Hegel," in Boutroux, *Études d'histoire de la philosophie allemande* (Paris, 1926), 93–114, at 102.

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the individual has no value in itself."[46] Here Boutroux introduces a line of thought that, as we shall see, will be reprised also by Brunschvicg, i.e. the idea that the Hegelian *Aufhebung* amounts to a neutralization of what may resist the process of sublation: "Hegelian Reason overcomes, absorbs, transforms (*hebt auf*) or rather eliminates intuition as such, thereby eliminating the accidental, the contingent, the individual."[47] Hegel managed to overcome the limited perspective of the Kantian abstract universality, finally achieving the synthesis between the universal and the individual. In Boutroux's view, however, the problem lies in the fact that this concrete universal is still too abstract, too hostile to the individual. Therefore, Hegel's philosophy remains a panlogism inasmuch as it rests on the assumption that the individual and the contingent may figure in the system only as starting points that philosophy should incorporate in the domain of Reason by lending them conceptual dignity—a dignity that, for Boutroux, involves nonetheless their destruction.

That Boutroux deeply cares for the question of contingency is no surprise. His doctoral dissertation, *De la contingence des lois de la nature*, published in 1874, was dedicated precisely to showing how contingency plays a crucial and positive role in the formulation of the laws of nature.[48] Against positivism, he developed a philosophy of nature that nowadays we would label emergentist: if science cannot account for a certain degree of contingency in nature, and if a gap separating the effect from its cause always subsists, then determinism proves to be unfounded from an ontological point of view. Overlooking or depreciating the role of contingency thus means to neglect the creative power and variety of nature. As Boutroux remarks in his reply to Berthelot, this is precisely what Hegel does by subjecting nature to spirit:

> Hegel denies any rational value to the individual variety as such. His dialectics condemns this variety to gradually polarize itself into two opposites, which, in turn, have to disappear as such and be reborn transfigured in a synthesis satisfying the principle of contradiction. Therefore, all the richness, all the creative fecundity of nature has no other meaning, no other *raison d'être* but the logical oppositions that reason will remove by annihilating the two combatants, at least in the form they had up to that moment ... All that exists is nothing but the synthetic idea ... nothing but a means, an instrument [that] finds its *raison d'être* only when the concrete unity, which is its proper actualization, appears.[49]

It is at this point that Boutroux addresses in passing the social implications of such a philosophical stance, drawing an alarming parallel with the relation

[46] Ibid., 104.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Émile Boutroux, *The Contingency of the Laws of Nature*, trans. Fred Rothwell (Chicago and London, 1920).

[49] Boutroux, "Sur la nécessité, la finalité et la liberté chez Hegel," 109.

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between the state and society: if we apply Hegel's logic to politics, society should be thought of as lacerated by a fatal struggle between opposite classes that cannot coexist, while the state should be conceived of as an entity that suffocates the autonomy of the individual. This latter point, which mirrors Renouvier's concern for the "totalitarian" logic behind Hegel's philosophy, returns regularly, almost obsessively, in Boutroux's subsequent writings. After the outbreak of the First World War, in fact, Boutroux's condemnation of Hegel's panlogism turned into a fierce critique of the alleged German philosophical will to power, with overt political connotations, to the point that, according to him, the essence of the German people consisted entirely in the desire to crush individuals and their freedom, dominate the other countries and annihilate any ideal of humanity.[50] Ultimately, panlogism came across as being nothing but the philosophical presupposition of a pan-Germanism.

MEYERSON'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS HEGEL'S "MONSTROUS MONUMENT"

Boutroux's case is symptomatic of how, during the First World War, intellectual and political frameworks tended to overlap frequently in the French reception of Hegel. The conflict exacerbated the cultural and chauvinistic stakes (previously raised by Sedan), which sometimes appeared to be higher than, if not inseparably mixed with, the philosophical ones. In this respect, Boutroux's anti-German acrimony was not an isolated case. The tendency to evaluate retrospectively German philosophy in the light of the Reich's political and military attitude was widespread during wartime, affecting the judgment of scholars of such caliber as Victor Delbos, Victor Basch and Charles Andler, an early sympathizer of Hegel. In his *L'esprit philosophique de l'Allemagne et la pensée française*, for example, Delbos wrote, "No other philosophy seems to have lent itself better than that of Hegel to the idea that the German people can indulge ... in their will to achieve spiritual and material domination."[51] This statement collided with Delbos's prudent and scholarly assessment of Hegel's philosophy in his 1909 lectures at the Sorbonne, later collected in *De Kant aux postkantiens* (1942). Like many French intellectuals of the time, Delbos was shocked by the German invasion of Belgium and in

[50] It is understood that this ideal of humanity is instead cultivated and defended in France, the nation that keeps alive the ancient *humanitas*. On this issue see Boutroux's wartime writings gathered in the posthumous *Études d'histoire de la philosophie allemande*: "L'Allemagne et la guerre" (1914), 115–36; "Germanisme et humanité" (1915), 137–62; "La pensée allemande et la pensée française" (1914), 163–96; "L'évolution de la pensée allemande" (1915), 197–228; "L'Allemagne et la guerre," 229–57.

[51] Victor Delbos, *L'esprit philosophique de l'Allemagne et la pensée française* (Paris, 1915), 38.

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particular by the *Aufruf an die Kulturwelt*, the manifesto drafted in 1914 by ninety-three German scholars, scientists and artists to support and justify the German military operations on the Western front. In a letter to Blondel, written in 1914, Delbos tried to explain the German misdeeds on the basis of the post-Kantian betrayal of the ideal of reason: "There is something enormous in German thought, beginning with Kant himself . . . under the pretext of idealism, a betrayal of the clear idea, of the luminous classic reason. I have had this feeling for several years."[52] For his part, Victor Basch (1863–1944), professor of German literature at the Sorbonne since 1906 and specialist in Kant and Schiller, refused to establish a parallel between German culture and political pan-Germanism in an article published in 1914 in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. Still, he saw in post-Kantian philosophy a dangerous mix of rationalism and mysticism.[53] Basch's text was followed and criticized two years later by another article on the philosophical origins of pan-Germanism written by his colleague at the Sorbonne Andler, member of the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière and future professor of German literature and language at the Collège de France.[54]

The fact that both Basch and Andler, as well as Boutroux and Delbos, were Germanists bears witness to the great affliction and sense of betrayal felt by French intellectuals during the war—a predicament that, as has been noted, was often resolved by the distinction between two different Germanies: the pre-Wilhelmine cosmopolitan Germany imbued with the universalist tradition of Leibniz and Kant and the Germany of the post-Fichtean ideology of the *Kultur*.[55]

After the war, however, a slow rehabilitation of Hegelian philosophy, from both the political and the theoretical perspective, began to take hold. For example, Basch tried to rehabilitate Hegel in his *Les doctrines politiques des philosophes classiques de l'Allemagne* (1927), while in his lessons at the Sorbonne Émile Bréhier (1876–1952) invited his audience to separate "social history" from the "history of ideas" when dealing with German thought.[56] Similarly, in his 1921 *De l'explication dans les sciences*, the Polish-born philosopher and philosopher of science Émile Meyerson reacted explicitly against the reduction of Hegel's thought to its alleged sociopolitical implications. As a member of the Société française de philosophie, Meyerson was well aware of the deep reverberations of the Hegelian ideas in

52 Quoted in Maurice Blondel, "Préface," in Victor Delbos, *De Kant aux postkantiens* (Paris, 1992), 5–21, at 14.

53 Victor Basch, "La philosophie et la littérature classiques de l'Allemagne et les doctrines pangermanistes," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 22 (1914), 768–93.

54 Charles Andler, "Les origines philosophiques du pangermanisme," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 23/5 (1916), 659–95.

55 Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 106–41.

56 Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie allemande* (Paris, 1921).

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contemporary philosophical and political thought, showing a complete mastery of the works of Hegel's main European critics and followers. Therefore, such nationalistic simplifications could not cloud his judgment, which was motivated on the contrary by very specific theoretical concerns.

The discussion of Hegel occupies a central and important role in Meyerson's book, which for this reason represents an exception in French philosophy of science. Meyerson himself was quite an original personality: born in Lublin, in 1870 he moved to Heidelberg to become a chemist, a profession he struggled to practice also after his arrival in Paris, in 1881, before obtaining a job at the Jewish Colonization Association and turning to philosophy. Before Koyré and Kojève, then, Hegel's philosophy was seriously treated in France by another East European immigrant who had studied in Germany and was immune to local prejudices or chauvinistic projections. Despite his involvement in the *société* and the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, as well as in various prestigious institutions (in 1926 he was appointed member of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques), Meyerson was a university outsider, and his epistemology was often perceived as clever and erudite but somewhat eccentric. The oblivion into which his work fell after the condemnation by Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962),[57] a disciple of Brunschvicg, has meant that his contribution to philosophical research in different domains (in this case, Hegel's French reception) has remained largely unexplored.[58]

His task being that of investigating how reason understands phenomena, Meyerson addresses the Hegelian doctrine from an epistemological perspective, i.e. from the angle of the relation between logic and philosophy of nature as exposed in the *Encyclopedia*. The reason behind Meyerson's fascination with what he considers a neglected part of Hegel's thought is the fact that it represents the last great attempt at an overall explanation of nature, even if it now appears to the reader as based on a completely outdated and bewildering conception of science. Meyerson maintains that, despite Berthelot's defense, there are legitimate reasons to charge Hegel with panlogism. Hegel's goal, in fact, was that of resolving "reality into a body of purely mental and *necessary* concepts,"[59] trusting that nature would eventually speak the voice of the notion—that, as Hegel said in the introduction

[57] Ndjate-Lotanga Wetshingolo, *La nature de la connaissance scientifique: L'épistémologie meyersonienne face à la critique de Gaston Bachelard* (Bern, 1996); Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos, *L'épistémologie d'Émile Meyerson: Une anthropologie de la connaissance* (Paris, 2009), 9–12.

[58] For a recent attempt to reverse this trend see Frédéric Fruteau de Laclos, *Le cheminement de la pensée selon Émile Meyerson* (Paris, 2009); and the aforementioned Laclos, *L'épistémologie d'Émile Meyerson.*

[59] Émile Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, trans. Mary-Alice Sipfle and David A. Sipfle (Dordrecht, 1991), 268, original emphasis.

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to the *Philosophy of Nature*, "the inscription on the veil of Isis, 'I am that which was, is, and will be, and my veil no mortal has lifted,' [would] melt away before thought."[60] In a way, it may even appear that the dialectical process, with its stress on the progressive overcoming (sublation) of the "irrational," corresponds to an actual depiction of how the mind works in experimental sciences.

Hegel was right to assume that science progresses by dealing with the contradictions and the antinomies that any reasoning has to face. And he was also correct in believing that "the process of *going beyond*" is crucial for the advancement of scientific knowledge.[61] Nonetheless, he failed to acknowledge that, in its march, science does not "sublate" or conserve the obstacle (the irrational, i.e. the external and contingent diversity that is irreducible to the concept), for any scientific advancement entails a retroactive rationalization of what previously appeared irrational, which means that the obstacle is not "elevated" but instead explained away, "obliterated." Furthermore, Meyerson claims that Hegel's faith in the possibility of sublating the irrational was motivated by the fact that he conceived the latter in an all too narrow manner. The irrational in Hegel is simply the *Anderssein*, the "otherness." As he famously said, "Nature is the Idea in the form of otherness [*Anderssein*]."[62] However, according to Meyerson, science has a more sophisticated and nuanced notion of the irrational: "It is precisely because he had previously stripped the irrational . . . of all the complexity this concept actually includes, that Hegel conceived the idea of subjecting it directly to his reason. Now that was to attempt the impossible."[63] In other words, the irrational cannot be constrained in the concept. To be fair, Hegel admits that the infinite variety of natural forms will forever escape the grasp of the Notion: "it is quite improper to expect the Notion to comprehend—or as it is said, construe and deduce—these contingent products of Nature."[64] On the contrary, the philosophy of nature is expected to "liberate the Spirit" hidden in nature, to find in nature the "counterpart" of the notion. The single objects, in their immediacy, as things whose existence is unmediated by the notion (and which therefore are "abstract"), are of no concern to philosophy. In other words, their existence is not the *true* existence, but rather a transient and "momentary" existence: "The Idea alone exists eternally, because it is being in and for itself . . . Nature is the first point in time, but the absolute *prius* is the

60 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830). Zweiter Teil. Die Naturphilosophie*, in Hegel , *Werke*, vol. 9 (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), 19; *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Arthur V. Miller (Oxford, 2004), 10.

61 Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, 290, original emphasis.

62 Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, §247, 24; *Philosophy of Nature*, 15.

63 Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, 299.

64 Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, §250, 35; *Philosophy of Nature*, 23.

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Idea; this absolute *prius* is the last, the true beginning, Alpha is Omega."[65] The problem, for Meyerson, lies precisely in this *logical* precedence of the Idea (qua full realization of a concept, unity of concept and object) and in the downgrading of the heterogeneity of nature, with all its variety and contingency of forms and phenomena. "The affirmative element in Nature—Hegel writes—is the manifestation [*das Durchscheinen*] of the Notion in it; the nearest instance of the power of the Notion is the perishableness [*Vergänglichkeit*] of this outer existence [*Äußerlichkeit*]."[66] The point, for Meyerson, is that Hegel defines a priori what is rational and what, on the contrary, is irrational, and this exposes his panlogism: Hegel thus "deduces" nature, and the irrational elements that still remain are nothing but "minor characteristics, due to the *play* of nature, to its *impotence*."[67]

This means that Hegel's panlogism, with its proverbial contempt for nature, results in a disregard for "science's search for rationality," relegating science to the mere work of collecting facts and empirical observations and leaving anything theoretical or explanatory to philosophy. Physics, Hegel claimed, provides nothing but "abstract" (i.e. empirical) materials that philosophy has to translate into the Notion. "Physics must therefore work into the hands of philosophy."[68] Yet the most recent scientific achievements of the nineteenth century (a recurring example in Meyerson's book is Carnot's principle[69]) show precisely the failure of Hegel's thought as applied to science. Hegel did not acknowledge the "*brute fact* . . . of the existence of an explanatory science"[70] that "has truly succeeded where Hegel's thought had failed so dismally. It has succeeded in penetrating the realm

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65 Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, §248, 30; *Philosophy of Nature*, 19.

66 Ibid.

67 Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, 331, original emphasis. By "play" and "impotence," Meyerson refers to paragraphs 248 and 250 of the *Philosophy of Nature*, where Hegel speaks of the "boundless and unbridled contingency" (*ungebundene, zügellose Zufälligkeit*) of Nature's "play of forms" (Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, 28; *Philosophy of Nature*, 17; translation modified) and defines the "impotence" (*Ohnmacht*) of Nature as the fact that it "preserves [*zu erhalten*] the determinations of the Notion only *abstractly*." Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, 34; *Philosophy of Nature*, 23.

68 Hegel, *Naturphilosophie*, §246, 20; *Philosophy of Nature*, 10.

69 "The nature of the obstacle standing here in the way of our understanding of phenomena was not specified until the nineteenth century with what was perhaps the most memorable, the most scientifically productive discovery witnessed by this remarkably fertile century—that of Sadi Carnot." Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, 154. According to Meyerson, Carnot's principle, by showing that the successive states of a system are different and nonequivalent because of the dissipation of energy, demonstrates that a full explanation of reality based on the principle of identity (which for Meyerson is the main regulative concept of human reason) is not possible.

70 Ibid., 512, original emphasis.

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of the irrational; it has been able (only partially, to be sure, and trying not to force it too much) to discipline, to dominate this irrational."[71]

In conclusion, Meyerson's judgment on Hegel is twofold: on the one hand, with his great attempt to provide a total rational explanation of nature, he has shown that the inmost essence of human mind *wants* nature to be rational; on the other hand, he went too far in his attempt, which eventually resulted in an "aberrant" conception of science[72] and in an "enormous" failure that makes the "monstrous monument"[73] of his *Naturphilosophie* "completely futile."[74]

BRUNSCHVICG'S ROMANTIC HEGEL

Due to his eccentric position within the philosophical field, and his ambivalent attitude towards Hegel, Meyerson managed to introduce a spurious theoretical reference in the debates on science and, at the same time, to see his work recognized as worthy of serious consideration by the intellectual community. His thought-provoking *oeuvre* drew in fact the attention of the most important philosophers of science of the time, like André Lalande (1867–1963),[75] Dominique Parodi (1870–1955),[76] and Léon Brunschvicg,[77] active members of the *société* as

71 Ibid., 381.

72 "Hegel does not intend to study the paths of scientific thought in order to codify them and thus make the further progress of this thought easier, more logical. What he wants is to accuse science before the tribunal of intelligence, to destroy it in the opinion of thinking men. If he reveals its anatomy, it is because he considers that it is horrible to behold and that the mere sight of it is sufficient to provoke disgust. He tears away the tawdry trappings with which he believes it has artificially covered itself, in order to expose it in its nakedness as an object of scorn and mockery. Behold, he seems to exclaim, this dazzling beauty which was the object of your most ardent desires, before which you prostrated yourself in boundless admiration. It is a hideous monster—worse than that, it is nothingness, an immense tautology with no content." Ibid., 512. After reading this passage, Baugh's and Bellantone's characterization of Meyerson's epistemology as "neo-Hegelian" appears highly questionable. See Bruce Baugh, "Limiting Reason's Empire: The Early Reception of Hegel in France," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31/2 (1993), 259–75, at 267; Bellantone, *Hegel in Francia*, 2: 492.

73 Meyerson, *Explanation in the Sciences*, 4.

74 Ibid., 442.

75 André Lalande, "L'épistémologie de M. Meyerson et sa portée philosophique," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 93 (1922), 259–80.

76 Dominique Parodi, "*De l'explication dans les sciences* par Émile Meyerson," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 31/4 (1924), 585–97.

77 Léon Brunschvicg, "La philosophie d'Émile Meyerson," in Brunschvicg, *Écrits philosophiques*, vol. 3, *Science—religion*, ed. Adrienne R. Weill-Brunschvicg and Claude Lehec (Paris, 1954), 183–206.

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well but, unlike Meyerson, utterly embedded in the university system.[78] Lalande was professor at the Sorbonne and director of the collective enterprise of the Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie, while Parodi served as the general inspector of public education. As to Brunschvicg, he held a key teaching position at the Sorbonne from 1909 to 1940, inheriting from Lévy-Bruhl Boutroux's chair of history of modern philosophy in 1927; he also presided over the jury of the *agrégation* from 1936 to 1938.

Brunschvicg's criticist idealism was the ultimate product of the layered and multifaceted "reflexive philosophy" that had dominated the Parisian academic system since Jules Lachelier's appointment at the École normale supérieure in 1864.[79] As an advocate of an intellectualist idealism that refused introspection in order to focus on the outer manifestations of the creative and free activity of the *esprit*, Brunschvicg felt certainly closer to Kant than to Hegel. In fact, as Raymond Aron once recalled, for the generation of the founders of the *Revue* "the history of philosophy culminated precisely with the *oeuvre* of Kant, continued or, according to them, deformed by Hegel."[80]

In his doctoral dissertation, titled *La modalité du jugement* (1897), Brunschvicg developed a philosophy of judgment largely inspired by a Kantian framework, in particular by the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,[81] mixed with Spinozian

[78] As Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Eva Telkes-Klein have shown, Meyerson was at the center of the main social circles of the time: besides his scientific relationships, he frequented the parlors of Aline Boutroux, Cécile Brunschvicg and Lévy-Bruhl, and dined frequently with the Lalandes or the Brunschvicgs. See the introduction to Émile Meyerson, *Lettres françaises*, éd. Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Eva Telkes-Klein (Paris, 2009).

[79] Brunschvicg himself provided a broader retrospective account of the reflexive philosophy of consciousness from Biran to Lachelier in his masterwork *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1927), 2: 594–602.

[80] Raymond Aron, "Préface," in Michelle Bo Bramsen, *Portrait d'Élie Halévy* (Amsterdam, 1978), i–iv, at i.

[81] In the free play of faculties that defines the reflective judgment, Brunschvicg discovers the possibility of addressing the activity of judgment in all its spontaneity and freedom, as the most peculiar expression of the creativity of the mind. He writes, "The method employed in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*—a method that makes this work the most satisfying of Kant's analyses, regardless of its relation with the two other *Critiques*—is the true method." Léon Brunschvicg, *La modalité du jugement* (Paris, 1964), 26. And, in the preface to the second edition of 1934, he adds that the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* releases us from "the uncertainties and the embarrassments that Kant suffered on account of his enslavement to the formalism of categories." Ibid., xi. Fichte's presence is more hidden, but we have to keep in mind the fact that Brunschvicg was very close to Xavier Léon (1868–1935), founder of the *société* and cofounder, with Élie Halévy, Brunschvicg himself and others, of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, which he also directed. Léon wrote two important books on Fichte, namely *La philosophie de Fichte: Ses rapports*

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and, more obliquely, Fichtean elements. Already in this early text, we can find a clear-cut stance towards Hegelian philosophy. First, Brunschvicg rejects the common prejudice concerning Hegel's alleged panlogism: the latter's philosophy does not amount to an "absolute position, a creation of being." On the contrary, Hegelian idealism "speculates" on being, which therefore must be given to it. In this sense, Brunschvicg believes that Hegel's doctrine could be better understood as a "dualism" positing being on the one hand and reason on the other. In this perspective, the spirit and being follow two parallel paths. This means that the dialectics, far from being a deterministic anticipation of becoming, is a process that makes sense only retrospectively: the final synthesis cannot be reduced to the previous steps of the dialectical movement; on the contrary, the synthesis posits and justifies the existence of the previous steps. Therefore, "the dialectical evolution owes its movement not to its starting point but rather to the end it seeks to achieve."[82] However, these considerations lead Brunschvicg to the conclusion that, in order to function, in order even to exist as such, the idealist dialectics must presuppose the existence, both at the beginning and at the end of its evolution, of a being that remains irreducible to any speculative analysis. Without assuming the existence of an external being that cannot be completely penetrated, dialectics could not work properly. This means that if the Hegelian dialectics has the form of necessity, then the contingent and the real cannot be completely exhausted and resolved in it,[83] and the relation between the real and the intelligible remains troubled by a radical irreducibility. The activity of the *esprit* eludes any comprehensive description of its functioning. Thinking does not express itself in a finite and fully accountable set of forms, for it implies always an oscillation and a negotiation between the *esprit*, with its moral and theoretical instances, and the real. If the "spiritual life consists in judgments, then there exists no metaphysical dialectics, which means that it is not possible to unify the successive moments of the intellectual activity by means of an interior law and then turn these successive moments into necessary moments."[84] In order to posit the synthetic necessity of these moments, a certain homogeneity between them would be required, regardless of their specific content. So, when confronted with the actual life of the *esprit*, Hegel's dialectics, with the linear and ideal homogeneity of its steps, appears to be nothing but a series of intelligible forms deprived of positive content.

avec la conscience contemporaine, published by Alcan in 1902, and *Fichte et son temps*, published by Armand Colin in 1922.

82 Brunschvicg, *La modalité du jugement*, 73.

83 Ibid., 72.

84 Ibid., 238.

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In his critique of Hegel, Brunschvicg remains faithful to the tradition of his masters, in particular to Boutroux,[85] and to what he believes to be the kernel of Kant's doctrine, namely a philosophy of reflection that could be opposed to any systematic approach to mind and history. In an article written for the 1924 issue of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* dedicated to Kant, he claims that the latter's philosophy does not spring from a "virtuality that precedes its constitution," where one could find its conclusions *in nuce*.[86] On the contrary, Kant's philosophy "searches painstakingly for a synthesis of which it cannot predict whether and how it will take place."[87] Brunschvicg attaches great importance to the transcendental deduction that allows Kant to move from science to the a priori forms of intuition and the pure concepts of understanding. He sees in the deduction the true method a reflexive analysis should follow; at the same time, however, he reproaches Kant for having considered geometry and mechanics fixed in a historical immutability. Kant was in fact convinced he had established once and for all the "official list" of forms and categories, a bias that was ultimately motivated for Brunschvicg by the incapacity of getting rid of a scholastic and dogmatic framework.[88]

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85 In *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*, he quotes approvingly a passage from Boutroux's objections to Berthelot, where Boutroux says, "Does pushing anything that is *other* to consider itself as *contradictory* really represent progress? Should we not, on the contrary . . . consider that which believes itself *contradictory* to be simply *other*? Where we think we see an opposition, a mutual exclusion, I would like to see, as far as possible, a variety that can become a harmony even without destruction, sublation or *Aufhebung* . . . Despite its wide scope, Hegel's system turns out to be somewhat narrow. It reduces every relation to contradiction and noncontradiction, thus disturbing and mutilating reality . . . Reason is a living being; it forms itself, cultivates itself, perfects itself, develops and enriches itself by feeding on realities, by adapting to things . . . Today our task should be to look for relationships of harmony and compossibility between things, beyond the logic relations of incompatibility and implication, and to steer reason towards the understanding of the individual." Boutroux, "Sur la nécessité, la finalité et la liberté chez Hegel," 109, original emphasis, quoted in Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience*, 2: 369.

86 Léon Brunschvicg, "L'idée critique et le système kantien," in Brunschvicg, *Écrits philosophiques, vol. 1, L'humanisme de l'Occident*, ed. Adrienne R. Weill-Brunschvicg and Claude Lehec (Paris, 1951), 206–70, at 208.

87 Ibid., 209.

88 See ibid., 224. This reproach marks the main difference between Brunschvicg's critical idealism and Renouvier's neo-criticism. In the first of his *Essais de critique générale* (1854), in fact, Renouvier, who advocated a theory of knowledge based on a radical phenomenalism, tried to formulate a new table of categories that differed significantly from the Kantian one. For example, he considered relation and personality as the most important categories, the first one being the most abstract and the second one the most concrete, also including space, time (now renamed "position" and "succession") and finality. See Charles Renouvier, *Essais de critique générale. Premier essai: Traité de logique générale et de logique formelle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1912), 1: 123. This interpretation of Kantianism,

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In his *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*, Brunschvicg returns to Hegel's philosophy, this time from a broader and more historical point of view, conceiving it as part of a "Romantic reaction" to Kant's breakthrough. Romanticism means for Brunschvicg everything that is opposed to the Cartesian and Kantian rationalism, namely intuitionism, sentimentalism, organicism and, ultimately, irrationalism.[89] In his view, Romanticism represents a thought of the undifferentiated that contrasts with the analytic light of the intelligence. This Romantic reaction is the course embarked upon by the German idealist thinkers, starting with Fichte, who considered Kant's criticism an intermediary step that philosophy should overcome in order to accomplish the task of the metaphysical deduction:

> From this point of view—Brunschvicg writes—, we cannot deny that Schelling and Hegel built upon Fichte to formulate a *philosophy of nature* dispensing with authentic knowledge while at the same time boasting about giving lessons in science to scientists, just to make it the model of a *philosophy of history* that keeps itself above or away from the reality of particular facts, while at the same time boasting about teaching history to chroniclers or learned men who are just too modest, scrupulous and accurate.[90]

Just like Meyerson, Brunschvicg sees Hegel's philosophy as lacking a method for a proper scientific knowledge of reality. In an article dedicated precisely to the philosophy of Meyerson, he builds on the latter's critique of Hegel by pointing out how Hegel "posits a logic or a *panlogist* universe governed by the monotone deployment of the ternary rhythm" of dialectics, a rhythm from which he deduces, in a purely ideal fashion, "the moments of nature and history, of art and politics, of morality and religion."[91] The dialectics, therefore, turns out to be nothing but

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still attached to the determination of the actual list of the pure concepts of understanding, was harshly criticized by Brunschvicg, to the point that, in an article dedicated to Octave Hamelin (1856–1907), he established a parallel between Hegel and Renouvier: "Hegel's conceptualism represented a step backwards in relation to the *Critique* in a proper sense, and this becomes even clearer, at least from a speculative perspective, if we consider Renouvier's doctrine, which nonetheless has been called *neo-criticism*." Léon Brunschvicg, "L'orientation du rationalisme," in Brunschvicg, *Écrits philosophiques, vol. 2, L'orientation du rationalisme*, ed. Adrienne R. Weill-Brunschvicg and Claude Lehec (Paris, 1953), 1–81, at 21–2, original emphasis. See also Brunschvicg, *L'expérience humaine et la causalité physique* (Paris, 1922), 299.

89 A similar critical stance towards Romanticism was already taken by Renouvier in his *Philosophie analytique de l'histoire*, 4: 493–4, where "Romanticism" means the tendency characterized by a "lack of taste for the idea and any alleged abstract truth," "the hostility towards duty," "a celebration of the principle of passion" and "the separation of the spirit from any subject requiring reflection or study."

90 Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience*, 2: 363, original emphasis.

91 Brunschvicg, "La philosophie d'Émile Meyerson," 205, emphasis added.

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a series of empty forms that are completely detached from the complex reality of things. In this sense, Hegelianism ends up being ultimately a dualism. Of course, the first step of the dialectics consists in positing being; however, what is posited is not being *as such*, but rather its concept. Considered in its immediate and abstract indetermination, being amounts therefore to nonbeing, and it is precisely the identity of the thesis with the antithesis that requires a synthetic moment, which is becoming. The evolution of the consciousness described in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* reveals, therefore, a more general logic, which will be deployed in the *Encyclopedia*: as Brunschvicg claims, the *Phenomenology* is just a *prologue* where Hegel presents the main characters of a drama that will take place only in the pages of the *Encyclopedia*.[92] Hegel is not interested in history, in its concrete development; on the contrary, he looks for what lies *beyond* history, for its outcome. His ambition in the *Encyclopedia* is to illustrate the progressive union of the concrete and the universal in a movement that goes from logic to nature and the various manifestations of the spirit (politics, art, philosophy, religion). But is it possible for Reason to take up being "on the lowest day of its nativity, in its *minimum* of intelligibility," and raise it "to the triumphant ascension, to the *maximum* of concrete reality and intellectual universality?"[93] This panlogist aspect is what Brunschvicg finds problematic. Even if, as we have seen, he does not accept the standard panlogist interpretation of Hegelian philosophy, the problems that he poses here are not so different from the critiques formulated by Boutroux against Berthelot in 1907. It is not by chance, in fact, that in the *Progrès* Brunschvicg quotes approvingly Boutroux's account of the dialectics as the sublation of the concrete under the universal. What Brunschvicg criticizes in Hegel is precisely the fact that his dialectics results in "a philosophy of the spirit that stands above consciousness itself just like the philosophy of nature stands above science."[94] Boutroux would certainly agree. For Brunschvicg, the reality of science and the *esprit* simply vanishes in Hegel's desire to establish a necessary unity in the absolute spirit between the logical process and the historical evolution. The notion of the *concrete universal* is nothing but a "loophole" (*échappatoire*),[95] "a means by which contemporary philosophy can elude or delay the contact with the authentic understanding of the real."[96] There is no need to resort to such an abstract notion when the encounter between the universal and the concrete has

92 Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience*, 2: 368, original emphasis.

93 Ibid., 369–70.

94 Ibid., 374.

95 Brunschvicg borrows this definition from the article on Meyerson's *De l'explication dans les sciences* where Lalande expressed some reservations about Meyerson's epistemology. See Lalande, "L'épistémologie de M. Meyerson et sa portée philosophique," 274.

96 Brunschvicg, *Le progrès de la conscience*, 2: 380.

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already taken place in modern science, with Newton and, in particular, with the union of science and philosophy in the founder of modern thought, Descartes. By celebrating the latter simply *as a philosopher*, Hegel failed to acknowledge that the author of the *Meditationes* was also the author of the *Géométrie*, that Descartes's thought rested precisely on the ruins of medieval scholasticism:

> If a modern thought exists, it is because Descartes was indivisibly a scientist and a philosopher at once, because he despised the vain generalities of Aristotelianism and the *universals of the dialecticians*, in order to become the master and the possessor of a universe deprived of any illusory virtuality, a universe that is given in its actual particularity and that is subjected to the rigid determinism of the mathematical equations. Hence, since the Cartesian science allows for the complete rationalization of the individual, the problem of the *concrete universal* can no longer arise.[97]

Hegel's philosophy, therefore, appears to be completely anachronistic and outdated, overtaken by the advancements of modern science. Another sort of concrete universal is at man's disposal in the scientific achievements of reason. Thus we do not have to be too eager to rectify or subsume what appears to be contingent or irregular under the positivity of reason, forcing the elements of mediation into the fixed and linear frame of a rational demonstration. On the contrary, the intellectual progress is made possible only by a "sensitive consciousness" that does not neglect, but rather assumes, the gaps between thought and reality, trying to respect the irreducibility of the real, not to hypostatize it, but rather to make it the thrust of the gradual effort of clarification that science and philosophy have to sustain. This amounts to an intellectualist conception of history and the progress of knowledge that reflects the humanist frame of the Third Republic, with its insistence on the struggle of mankind to achieve a full understanding of reality through a thorough reflection on the intellect and its creative activity.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A NEW HEGEL

As we have seen, the standard condemnation of Hegel that was an expression of official French academic philosophy under the Third Republic, and that we find articulated by Boutroux and Brunschvicg, was counterbalanced by isolated attempts, such those of Berthelot and (to a lesser extent) Meyerson, to provide a different and more positive understanding of Hegelian philosophy—without much success. The analysis of the panlogism controversy brings to light the existence of nuanced positions within the turn-of-the-century philosophical field

97 Ibid., original emphasis.

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that were, however, moments of an *internal* dialectics, still inscribed in a climate that was on the verge of changing radically.

The shift that occurred in the 1930s towards a different image of Hegel as the thinker of the unhappy consciousness did not amount to a mere change of heart. On the contrary, it was paralleled by a broader generational turn that, through the discovery of new intellectual horizons, like Marxism, psychoanalysis and phenomenology, called into question the intellectual authority of the old academic elite. When Brunschvicg wrote the final chapters of the *Progrès*, advocating a critical idealism "in which the *esprit* becomes transparent to itself thanks to a deeper understanding of its original principle,"[98] things were already moving. In the following decade, faith in the transparency of reason faded dramatically. After the crisis of 1929, a new generation of philosophers born in the first years of the century and ravaged by the experience of the war began to consider that very faith as an ideological fetish that needed to be abandoned in the name of a more *concrete* account of history and experience. As a "heretical" student of Brunschvicg, Georges Politzer (1903–42), observed in 1929, the notion of "the concrete" became an omnipresent refrain,[99] and in *Vers le concret* (1932) Jean Wahl enhanced this momentum, which he himself contributed to in his 1920 book *Les philosophies pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*. In *Les chiens de garde* (1932), the Marxist intellectual Paul Nizan (1905–40) famously portrayed Brunschvicg himself as the archetype of the institutional philosopher whose abstract ruminations are unable to account for what happens to ordinary men in their daily life: death, war, unemployment, illness, humiliation.[100] The place of man in history and his existential predicament became, then, the obsession of an entire generation, and Hegel's unhappy consciousness came to epitomize man's struggles in a time of material and intellectual crisis.

The establishment of new points of theoretical reference was driven by a cohort of Eastern European immigrants like Georges Gurvitch (1894–1965), Koyré (who, interestingly enough, was recommended to the École pratique by an older immigrant, Meyerson), Kojève, Éric Weil (1904–77), Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–95) and, later, Aron Gurwitsch (1901–73). Furthermore, new institutions like the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) delivered courses that served as an alternative to the more traditional curriculum of the Sorbonne and the École normale. From his position at the EPHE, Koyré would remind the Brunschvicg of *Progrès* that Hegel's philosophy, far from being an empty panlogist construction,

98 Ibid., 750.

99 Georges Politzer, "La fin d'une parade philosophique: Le bergsonisme," in Politzer, *Contre Bergson et quelques autres: Écrits philosophiques, 1924-1939*, ed. Roger Bruyeron (Paris, 2013), 127–260, at 131.

100 Paul Nizan, *Les chiens de garde* (Paris, 1960), 33–4.

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invites us to explore the layered links between things, the "living identity of the *concrete*,"[101] while his successor, Kojève, would insist in his seminars (1933–9) on the role of *negativity* in human history. But in his last years, the old Brunschvicg would continue to decry Hegel and the new fashion of the concrete,[102] loyal to the end to his humanist and idealist criticism.

The rediscovery of Hegel must be located precisely against the backdrop of this general crisis of legitimization coupled with the introduction of foreign philosophical frames. As Jean Hyppolite wrote, his generation discovered the *Phenomenology* of Hegel and the phenomenology of Husserl almost concomitantly, finding in them a "meditation on concrete experience."[103] Husserl's phenomenology was adopted by many students of Brunschvicg,[104] like Lévinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) and, at least initially, Raymond Aron (1905–83), who all eventually turned their back on the abstract idealism of their master. In his 1939 article on Husserl's notion of intentionality, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) remarked, "We have all read Brunschvicg, Lalande, and Meyerson. We have all believed that the spidery mind [*Esprit-Araignée*] trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance."[105] Paradoxically, Sartre's characterization of the old philosophy as a "digestive philosophy" mirrored the latter's conception of Hegelian thought as a devouring idealism. In this respect, Hyppolite highlighted the elements of continuity and discontinuity with the previous panlogist reading of Hegel: "What we refused in Hegel was the dialectics as a constructive procedure; what

[101] Alexandre Koyré, "Note sur la langue et la terminologie hégéliennes," in Koyré, *Études d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*, 191–224, at 179–80, emphasis added. Geroulanos has also stressed the importance of *Recherches philosophiques*, the review founded by Koyré, for the mapping and the diffusion of the new philosophical trends. See Geroulanos, *An Atheism That Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought*, 55–7.

[102] Brunschvicg always identified the true concrete with the scientific and philosophical image of the world worked out by the understanding, i.e. with what appeared to his critics as the most abstract form of knowledge. In 1934 he denounced this "*qui pro quo*" that lured young people into the trap of the generational clash and that generated "today's youth fascination for what they call the *concrete*", as well as "their repulsion ... for an idealism that they regard as *lifeless*." Léon Brunschvicg, *Les âges de l'intelligence* (Paris, 1953), 132, original emphasis.

[103] Jean Hyppolite, "L'intersubjectivité chez Husserl," in Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique: Écrits 1931–1968*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1971), 1: 499–512, at 500–1.

[104] It is an irony of history that Brunschvicg himself invited Husserl to deliver his lectures at the Sorbonne in 1929. See Christian Dupont, *Phenomenology in French Philosophy: Early Encounters* (Dordrecht, 2013).

[105] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology," in Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, eds., *The Phenomenological Reader* (London and New York, 2002), 382–5, at 382.

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we admired in the *Phenomenology* of 1807 was the dialectics 'as the experience of consciousness itself.'"[106] This change in perspective in Hegel studies, the shift of focus from the *Encyclopedia* to the *Phenomenology*, was not, then, as Foucault suggested, the final incarnation of a haunting shadow, as if in a teleological process, but rather the symptom of a general telluric displacement that would eventually lead to the collapse of the ancient philosophical boundaries.

[106] Hyppolite, "L'intersubjectivité chez Husserl," 501.

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